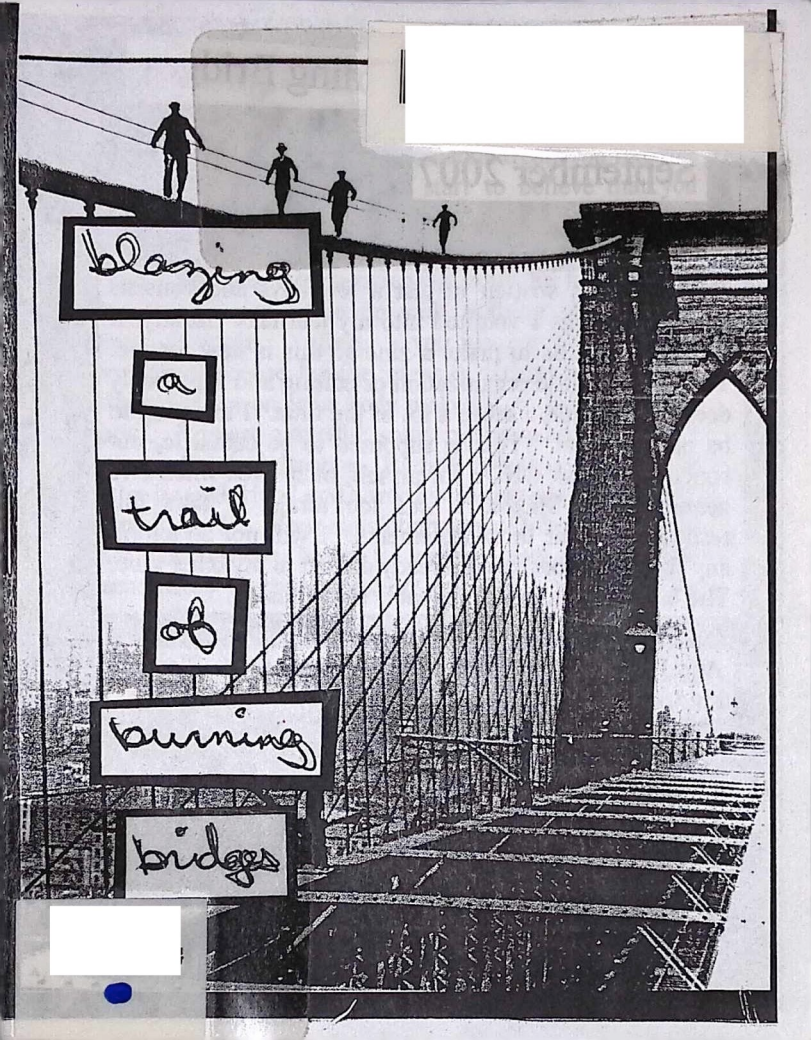




blazing

a

trail

of

burning

bridges

Blazing a Trail of Burning Bridges

September 2007

This zine was written in just a few days and consists mostly of things I vomited into my journal. Usually, it takes me months to make a zine so this is new for me. There's very little organization or editing and it probably doesn't even make sense a lot of the time. I'm trying to be ok with that. This is supposed to be cathartic, not concise. I speak ONLY for myself, often even when I've generalized. Maybe, I was too afraid to take full responsibility for those statements. I will not be telling any life stories because I already do that in my other zine. The lack of context will probably be confusing.

And I am most definitely incriminating myself. Please be kind.

I just need to talk, ok?

"The Rough Patch"

Part I. You know how when someone treats you like shit for so long that you actually start to believe that you must've really done something awful? You begin to wonder if your loving, generous heart is really just made of shit. You obsessively rack your brain for answers, but even though you come up with nothing of substance every. single. time. you just can't let it go. It doesn't make sense, but the intensity of this unexplainable guilt weighing on your body makes it so that it doesn't matter. You are a hurtful, shitty person who's obviously getting what they deserve. (Right?) You stop feeling like you're a good friend and a worthwhile person. Everything seems like a lie. Your convictions about who you are and what you believe begin to weaken and your coping mechanisms disappear one by one. It's Summer Pity Party 2007.

Part II. It was full on psychological warfare and I didn't even know I was playing the game even though I've had to so many times before. By the time I understood what was happening it was too late. My shitty childhood and shitty young adulthood haven't yet instilled enough bitterness or meanness in my heart to truly play the game, so I fail miserably every time no matter what's at stake. I can never seem to get the rules right. I'm not some fucking Mother Teresa, but I just have too much



goddamn sympathy. I care too deeply. I stand there like a chump and take it. Face down to the ground. I feel my self-esteem, hard-fought sense of safety and mental stability trickle down my body and escape through my toes, rippling across the ground in heat waves.

I'm the perfect pawn.

I wish I could be one of those people who are just like, "Fuck her, it's her problem. Not mine." And just get over it. (Wait, no I don't... but kinda maybe a little...)

Part III. Cryptic, yeah? I kinda hate when people write like that. I always want direct communication and honest answers. I guess sometimes it's impossible to tell the truth, especially when you have so much to lose by telling it and you've already been through enough. So, for now I'm gonna leave you with this idea about something I was going through recently and I want you to try to take the sentences that make sense to you, maybe the ones you identify with, and create your own story, maybe about your own life. Put some context to it all if you need to, I don't mind. Anything to make this less likely to be cast off as dramatic and pointless.

Essentially, I was in a harmful situation where my attempts at honest communication were repeatedly met with anger and rejection. Because talking about shit f'real is how I work things out and slowly that became an

impossibility, this situation made me lose my coping mechanisms and my mental health rapidly declined. Every day, I'd wake up and go to bed with my chest pounding with anxiety and my stomach clenched so tight I felt like I was going to shit out my own damn heart. This situation was also incredibly triggering of other painful experiences I've had, so it was always hard to gauge how safe I was. The line between what was really happening and my triggers kept getting blurry.

After this situation was over, I was left feeling really fucking... crazy? Traumatized? Confused? All of the above. I was having panic attacks all of the time. I just could not get my shit together. I was left once again feeling hopeless and shitty about the fact that every time something traumatizing happens to me, I go into a fucked up downward spiral. It didn't help that during this time I decided I needed to switch therapists and because I do low income counseling I've been on a waiting list since. It's been more than two months now and life without therapy is not treating me kindly.

I want to talk about mental health. I want to talk about my experiences living with mental illness, namely posttraumatic stress disorder* and it's not-so-fun offshoots that I deal with: panic disorder*, depression* and possibly borderline personality disorder*. I am not an authority on any of these things. I am writing this because this "rough patch" has thrown me back into a

major depression and I need to talk about it to get out of it. Every day my life is becoming just a little bit more like I've always wanted it to be, only I'm realizing it's never going to be exactly how I pictured it because of my mental health issues and I want to talk about what that means. Living with mental illness and being a survivor of various forms of domestic violence, namely childhood abuse and domestic partner violence, I have a hard time relating to people and I'm rarely off guard. I'm marked for life. I will never really fit in. I will always be a little too intense. And a little too much. Some people are drawn to me because of it; most people stay away because they don't understand. This ain't no teenage angst bullshit! I can be the charming odd bird, or one crazy bitch. I am unpredictable and I don't like it, but I want to be ok with it. It takes a lot for me to feel safe and if I don't, I'm probably existing somewhere in my head. I spend *a lot* of time in my head. I want to talk about the silence around mental health in the communities I belong to which keeps me feeling extremely isolated. And I want to make this for my friends who don't really know what the hell is going on with me because sometimes I just disappear.

So, here are some decent medical definitions of what I go through. I feel like medical definitions have a way of trivializing the reality of having these issues. I also get overwhelmed reading them back to back like this and it makes me feel embarrassed and crazy. Feel free to skip all of this because it's really boring even if it provides some pretty important context.

****Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)** is the term for a severe and ongoing emotional reaction to an extreme psychological trauma. The latter may involve someone's actual death or a threat to the person's or someone else's life, serious physical injury, or threat to physical and/or psychological integrity, to a degree that usual psychological defenses are incapable of coping. PTSD symptoms may include: nightmares, flashbacks, emotional detachment or numbing of feelings (emotional self-mortification or dissociation), insomnia, avoidance of reminders and extreme distress when exposed to the reminders ("triggers"), loss of appetite, irritability, hypervigilance, memory loss (may appear as difficulty paying attention), excessive startle response, clinical depression, and anxiety.*

[[I don't like how clinical this sounds, but it was the most accurate definition I could find because it included psychological trauma whereas most definitions were only about physical trauma.]]

****Panic disorder** is an anxiety disorder and is characterized by unexpected and repeated episodes of intense fear accompanied by physical symptoms that may include heart palpitations, shortness of breath, dizziness, abdominal distress, sudden attacks of terror, usually accompanied by a pounding heart, sweatiness, weakness*

or faintness. During these attacks, people with panic disorder may flush or feel chilled; their hands may tingle or feel numb; and they may experience nausea, chest pain, or smothering sensations. Panic attacks usually produce a sense of unreality, a fear of impending doom, or a fear of losing control.

A fear of one's own unexplained physical symptoms is also a symptom of panic disorder. People having panic attacks sometimes believe they are having heart attacks, losing their minds, or on the verge of death. They can't predict when or where an attack will occur, and between episodes many worry intensely and dread the next attack.

[[Yeah, pretty much it's a big bummer! This is the thing that inhibits my life the most because when it's happening there is almost nothing I can do to stop it and it happens so randomly. I'm triggered into panic attacks even by the mention of a name or a memory. It blows.]]

**A depressive disorder is an illness that involves the body, mood, and thoughts. It affects the way a person eats and sleeps, the way one feels about oneself, and the way one thinks about things. A depressive disorder is not the same as a passing blue mood. It is not a sign of personal weakness or a condition that can be willed or wished away. People with a depressive illness cannot merely "pull themselves together" and get better.*

[[I used to basically be depressed all of the time as a kid

and a teenager, but when I got older and started dealing with my shit, I mostly experience depression after frequent bouts of panic. It's the comedown from the intense moodswings that tend to lead me into a depressive state.]]

****Borderline personality disorder (BPD) is a serious mental illness characterized by pervasive instability in moods, interpersonal relationships, self-image, and behavior. This instability often disrupts family and work life, long-term planning, and the individual's sense of self-identity. There is a high rate of self-injury without suicide intent, as well as a significant rate of suicide attempts and completed suicide in severe cases.***

A person with BPD may experience intense bouts of anger, depression, and anxiety that may last only hours, or at most a day. These may be associated with episodes of impulsive aggression, self-injury, and drug or alcohol abuse. Distortions in cognition and sense of self can lead to frequent changes in long-term goals, career plans, jobs, friendships, gender identity, and values. Sometimes people with BPD view themselves as fundamentally bad, or unworthy. They may feel unfairly misunderstood or mistreated, bored, empty, and have little idea who they are. Such symptoms are most acute when people with BPD feel isolated and lacking in social support, and may result in frantic efforts to avoid being alone.

People with BPD often have highly unstable patterns of social relationships. While they can develop intense but stormy attachments, their attitudes towards family, friends, and loved ones may suddenly shift from idealization (great admiration and love) to devaluation (intense anger and dislike). Thus, they may form an immediate attachment and idealize the other person, but when a slight separation or conflict occurs, they switch unexpectedly to the other extreme and angrily accuse the other person of not caring for them at all. Even with family members, individuals with BPD are highly sensitive to rejection, reacting with anger and distress to such mild separations as a vacation, a business trip, or a sudden change in plans. These fears of abandonment seem to be related to difficulties feeling emotionally connected to important persons when they are physically absent, leaving the individual with BPD feeling lost and perhaps worthless. Suicide threats and attempts may occur along with anger at perceived abandonment and disappointments.

People with BPD exhibit other impulsive behaviors, such as excessive spending, binge eating and risky sex. BPD often occurs together with other psychiatric problems, particularly bipolar disorder, depression, anxiety disorders, substance abuse, and other personality disorders.

[[Holy definition! This is only something I've been recently considering and I have NOT been diagnosed with

it, so I'm not adding it to the roster just yet.. I identify with most of it, but to a lesser degree and there are a number of things that I don't identify with so it's entirely possible I don't have this. My partner doesn't feel like this accurately describes me, but I guess ze can't really know that for sure. I don't have a lot of identity hang-ups (anymore), my form of self-injury is food restriction (starvation), I don't feel bored or empty (but I used to big time), I enjoy alone time (for the most part) and I don't generally react to many situations with anger. I really want to discuss this with my new therapist.]]

Living with bad mental health has me spending a lot of time feeling sketchy. Like I'm ducking behind corners or hiding behind trees. The strategy is to escape human interaction. The hoodwink is that I simultaneously feel like human interaction is the only thing that's going to keep me from completely losing it and disappearing from the world. It's my very real moments with people that remind me that everything truly will be ok.

Sometimes, I just wanna say to people upon meeting them, "Hi, I'm Jenny. I'm not sketchy, I just have bad mental health, but it's not the kind where I like, fuck you over. It's more like the kind where I fuck *myself* over. And over. And over. And...

I am a truly blessed person. I have amazing friends who give me endless amounts of encouragement. I have people who really believe in me and they actually take the time to say so. I feel like such an asshole when I'm skeptical of their lovely words. I feel ungrateful and unappreciative. Who the fuck do I think I am to doubt the things they actually feel so strongly about that they wanna share them with me? I absolutely believe that they mean these things, but it just doesn't sink in. Sometimes, handwritten letters help, as if the tangible evidence makes it real or something. I have such strange self-esteem issues. I know in my gut that I am an awesome and worthy person. I know that I am compassionate, honest, trustworthy, funny, smart, stylish, loving, cute, talented, interesting and so on. I know that I am worthy of my friends and my partner. Yet, I spend so much time feeling like everyone hates me or that I'm really not the things that I am (or *enough* of these things) and maybe I'm not really that worthy. Maybe, I'm just too fucked up to deserve these things. Quite honestly, my mental health issues sometimes do keep me from being the best friend that I can be. I can love you like your mama does and in the next moment disappear. I also shut down randomly and that probably leaves people feeling like I'm not interested in them or not having a good time in social situations. I space out a lot. Being my friend must be really exhausting. I suppose that much of this doubt comes from the fact that I am always worried that someone is about to fuck me over and all that I really have in this world is myself. I HATE THIS ABOUT

MYSELF. I have become so untrusting and I hate it, but I have so many reasons and experiences that have led me to this shitty mindset. My survivor history draws abusive and manipulative people to me. Regardless, I can't keep moving through my life so overcome with fear and obsessing over people's motives. This paranoia is embarrassing and tiring. I know that all I can do to stop shitty things from happening is to keep myself away from people who don't really have my back and who I can't really be my weird, emotional self with. I've gotten really good at weeding out the bad eggs, but I know that bad shit is simply just going to happen every now and again and living in fear of it does nothing good for me. The thing about my real friends is that even when I am being an untrusting creep, I do know that they are trustworthy and that's enough for me to know that it's just my own shit. Regardless, while I mostly internalize these feelings I can only assume that I might be projecting them. If there's one thing I've learned from myself and others is that projecting your bullshit is alienating to those around you, which in turn leaves you feeling alienated. It's shitty. This is something I've worked really hard on not doing.

I may lose sight sometimes, but I am really grateful for my friends. Four years ago, I moved to Portland with no friends other than other zinesters who I was never really able to get close to. I was depressed a lot during my first two years here and a year long abusive relationship with someone who wouldn't allow me to have friendships of my own only impacted the process of making real friends.

Needless to say I didn't have a very good shot at meeting the right people. I've cycled through many friendships and burned many a bridge, which bothered me for a long time. I definitely attracted people who have really intense mental health issues, but who aren't actively working on their shit, which doesn't work for me because I am such a caretaker and take on their issues. Come to think of it, I've attracted people like this to me my whole life. People I have to baby and walk on eggshells around. People who want so much and give so little. Who am I to think I can take care of *anyone*?

One invaluable lesson I've learned is that a lot of people don't want meaningful friendships. This has been a bitter pill to swallow when I've met people who I have a lot in common with and yet we still don't really click. On the other hand, I've learned that I *do* need to have a deep connection with the people I spend a lot of time with. I need trust. If I can't tell someone what I'm really feeling in a moment without both of us feeling stupid and uncomfortable, I'm probably not going to be able to spend a lot of time with them. However, I want to be better at appreciating the people in my life whom I simply have fun times with. Expecting more than they can give isn't fair for either of us. I feel like I'm learning this all really slowly, but that it's paying off. For the last year, I've maintained some really incredible friendships. This is new for me.

Personally, I feel like everyone has mental health issues to a degree, but most people just don't have to deal with

them on a daily basis. They don't lose their shit every time something bad happens. They have the coping abilities to make the next move without letting fear confuse and trick them. Must be nice. If there is one thing I'm ever grateful for, it's that some of my best friends also deal with difficult mental health issues. Err, not that I'm happy they get to feel as fucked up and weird as I do, but it's relieving to not be alone. Uh, am I wording that ok? I don't always have to explain to them why I can't deal and they don't have to do that with me, but we do talk about this stuff all of the time. They make me feel heard and validated and maybe not so much like the crazy fucker I often think I am.

There's a flip side to this, which we've been discussing as of late. While these friends of mine are absolutely my best support network, there are still times when we just can't be there for each other because our own shit is so debilitating. It totally sucks. I mean, most of the time we have the emotional means to prioritize what is most important, but it still happens and it hurts. Just recently, me and two friends were in a situation where we were all dealing with fucked up shit and we just simply couldn't get out of our own heads enough to be there for each other. We'd contact each other infrequently and give well wishes, but it wasn't enough for any of us and now we're all getting a bit better and talking about how this all went so haywire. I guess one positive thing is that we get to come out of it knowing that our friendships are still ok. There doesn't need to be a lot of apologies and

explanations. We just get it.

I want to talk about what a "bad day" usually looks like for me. I wake up with difficulty, feeling a sense of dread over what to do with myself that day even though I have a long list of things that need to be done. Every instance of human interaction fills me with panic, as I am convinced that I am about to receive some bad news or that someone is mad at me. Or worse, no one will contact me and then I feel forgotten. (I blame this partially on the immediacy of cell phone and internet communication.) If I feel forgotten, I will sometimes start thinking that maybe I've been fooling myself about having good friends or that my partner is cheating on me, or something fucked up like that. Wow. That feels so fucked up to say. I also emotionally and sexually shut down on bad days. I can't be present with a person and sex is nearly impossible because I can't stay in my body (disassociation). At night, I will have a hard time falling asleep and I'll have nightmares about everyone I love moving away without telling me or, recurring dreams about my ex-boyfriend chasing me or, my dad trying to kill me. (I have never put this in writing and I am freaking the fuck out now.)

This is most definitely the extreme of what a "bad day" is for me. My bad days are in varying degrees of what I described. Sometimes, the bad days turn good and sometimes they're so bad I feel like I'm losing my mind. It feels really good to say that the bad days have become

rather infrequent. If I'm going through a low period, it can be every day or on most days, but during the ok times it's only a few days a month and I can usually talk myself down.

Playing the Victim is a really unfortunate thing that I see people who deal with mental illness* do all of the time. Um, myself included. I really don't want to speak for others, but I'm finding it difficult to not make broad statements because I've experienced this with so many people. Because mental illness tends to make one very self-centered, it is very easy to not see how your behavior affects others. It's often about what other people are *doing to you*. I think people with bad mental health often take things very personally, when it has nothing to do with them. I can't even say how many times I've just wanted to grab someone by the shoulders and say, "This. isn't. about. you." It's so irritating! When you're constantly playing the victim, it can be really hard to see what your bad qualities are. In my early twenties, I finally noticed how strange it was that every problem I ever had with anyone was always their fault and I was just the innocent victim. Since then I've been really aware of my behavior at all times to the point of obsession. I feel like I'm constantly practicing how I will word something to someone and my fixation on how I should act keeps me from really living in the moment. Now, I'm trying to work on not being so worried about how I come off. I

*correction: People who deal with similar issues to mine.

think I have the self-awareness to know that I'm not always gonna say the wrong thing.

On that note, I wanna share what I feel are my bad qualities because I feel like it's really easy to talk about how mental illness has made me it's victim, when I am often my own worst perpetrator:

1. I am easily irritated. I try to hide it because I know it's pointless, but that doesn't always work. Everyone in my family is like this and it really bothers me.
2. I don't trust anyone, which creates issues with partners and sometimes rather than vocalizing my untrusting feelings, I will act them out passive aggressively.
3. I always think I know what's best for people. This is almost laughable considering how I can hardly take care of myself sometimes.
4. I don't appreciate or understand the importance of my contributions to the communities I exist in. I often don't feel worthy of the feedback I receive even though I always mean everything I say to other people.
5. I am a go-getter to the extreme. If something needs to be done, I often feel like I am the person who needs to do it. I feel like this doesn't give others the space to contribute. I absolutely over-volunteer with everything.
6. I hold major grudges and I'm not very forgiving.
7. I am often not present in a situation. Sometimes, I am so in my head that I'm just hopeless.

8. I internalize everything! I take on whatever other people are projecting and let it fester within the bowels of my soul. Ugh, I hate this!

And I am sure there are many more, but these are the ones that I think about constantly. I really want to make a list of my good qualities, but it's hard for me to be self-congratulatory and uh, when I tried it sounded a little too resume-like. In short, I feel that I am really good at addressing my issues with something or someone before it turns into a problem; I've been through a lot, so I am very compassionate and often have a good understanding of what people are going through; I'm very nurturing and loving and a mama, for sure; I'm really funny (no, really); I'm loyal and I will have your back; I'm creative and have lots of ideas. Ok, I'm feeling uncomfortable, so I'm going to stop there, heh.

How to be an ally to me when I'm just too weird to deal with!

(Originally from Not Sorry #3.)

A lot of the time I just feel like I can't talk about things when I'm sad, I can't really do anything. Although, a lot of that has to do with fear that the person I might try to talk to isn't going to be able to really support me. For the

record, I really don't need much. So far it includes:

*check in on me! you don't have to call me everyday, but if we haven't talked in awhile and you know things haven't been sunshine and flowers for me, ask me how i'm doing and if i need anything. maybe, all i want is for you to come over and drink some tea with me and watch "my so-called life" or something. just make yr presence and support known to me.

*if i can't open up, don't take it personally. i probably can't be open with anyone at the moment. just don't give up on me. don't say/feel things like, "if she won't tell me what's wrong, i can't be there for her," because that's such bullshit.

*just be sensitive. you don't have to understand what i'm going through, or what it's like to be like this. we're friends for so many reasons, not because we happen to share the same issues and coping mechanisms.

*if i tell you that i feel like yr not being there for me, don't get defensive and blow me off. i don't ask for much and it's probably taking a lot out of me to be this honest with you. in turn, you can be honest with yr reasons for not being there for me. maybe yr going through yr own shit and feel like you don't want to add to my problems or can't be there for me as much as you'd like to for specific

reasons. i understand how this can be so maybe we can work out some sort of middle ground.

*let me know what i can do to be a good ally to you, too. i understand that our needs may be completely different and i want to be just as supportive and there for you as i need you to be for me.

So, what am I doing to cope with all of this bullshit? is a question that plagues me all of the time. It's only been in the last few years that I've finally understood that not only do I need help, but that I deserve help. Until recently, I was in therapy and I was able to manage my shit in a way that I never could on my own. Not to say that everything was ok because of therapy, but simply knowing that I had therapy to look forward to helped me to utilize my coping mechanisms effectively. Not being in therapy, like I am right now, makes me feel at an utter loss. My coping mechanisms seem silly and meaningless. Recently, I tried co-counseling, which essentially involves two people who share time in a session. For half the session one person is in the "counselor" role and the other is in the "client" role. For the second half of the session the roles switch. You get to set guidelines and boundaries from the beginning, as well as decide on the length of the session. This was a

great experience for me, but the person I tried it with just moved and while I'm open to doing it again, it seems really daunting to find another person who I feel I can really talk to who is willing to make this kind of commitment. I think it would be really interesting to do co-counseling combined with regular counseling/therapy.

And then there's medication. I waffle about being on medication all of the time. On the really bad days, I know that I need it, but on the good days I completely lose sight of how bad those bad days can be. I have this fear of being medicated *all of the time*. Like, I'll change so drastically I won't be able to identify myself. I've had a lot of friends who've experienced really gnarly side effects to drugs and it scares me. There's also the whole sexual aspect. You know, like on some drugs you lose your sex drive and because my PTSD makes sex sometimes impossible, I don't wanna make it any worse. Of course, there's the whole argument about what's more important, but quite honestly I think a healthy sex life is vital to good mental health. My partner tells me that drugs aren't really like that anymore, but I don't wanna take my chances!

Regardless, I have actually made the decision to start taking drugs for panic disorder. I feel like if I can get that under control it will have positive effects on the other stuff I deal with. Hopefully. I don't really know, but that's what I'm going to find out when I get back into therapy. I want drugs for all of those times when things

are so out of control that there's nothing I can do for myself.

When things are shitty, but not hopeless, there are some little things I can do to feel better in the moment. 1) Write in my journal. Documentation is really awesome for me since I live in my head so much. Also, my brain has this really not-so-awesome way of trying to block out bad memories, so writing them down makes things more real; 2) Zone out with a craft project or movie (usually both). Crafting is really excellent because you have something physical to manifest your energy into and the tangibility feels undeniably positive. Knitting is great for me because I can totally have a conversation or watch a movie while doing it, but it still requires a lot of focus; 3) Try to hang out with someone one-on-one, preferably someone I can talk to about stuff; 4) Abstain from caffeine (as if! but I should try harder.); 5) Dress up in my most amazing outfit of the moment for no reason; 6) Wear sexy lingerie and masturbate. And really make the effort with lube, toys and making it really hot; 7) Go thrift store shopping, though I do think I do this a bit compulsively and I tend to spend too much when I'm depressed; 8) Take myself out on a date to dinner and a movie; 9) Ride my bike; 10) Dance! With friends or alone with my eyes closed; 11) Not spend too much time on the internet. The weird faux reality of websites like Myspace, Livejournal or any kind of message board really depress me when I spend too much time on them; 12) Hang out with my cats!

This all sounds really silly, but if I'm not too far off in Jenny Land, they really can help.

Dear you, If you have any suggestions for me about things that help you out, especially about herbal remedies for mental health stuff, I'm really interested. Also, if you're in Portland and want to possibly do co-counseling with me, we should totally talk. Thank you!

So now that I've convinced you that my life is utter shit and I should just

give up I'm going to quit with the drama and tell you what my life is *really* like. My day-to-day life is really... nice. Yeah, nice. I kind of hate that word, but it seems appropriate right now. I wake up early, hang out with my cats, drink coffee or tea and work on crafts or zines or clean. Often I have friends over and we'll talk and watch Morrissey videos and they'll cuddle my cats. Later in the afternoon, I go to work at a place that doesn't steal or corrupt my soul. It's not my ideal job, but the money is ok and I've been there two-and-a-half years and I'm not in a hurry to leave. I come home late at night, read for a bit and go to sleep, holding the stuffed squirrel my partner made me for my 24th birthday, spooning my big cat and my little cat sleeps on top of my hip. My days off are usually filled with meetings for all of my activist groups and I try to hang out with all of my friends who I don't get to see during the week because of our schedules. I

also spend as much time as I can with my partner, who is probably the most amazing person I've ever met. Sometimes I have get togethers in my lovely little home that I have painstakingly decorated to the max. We'll barbeque or have potlucks or craft. My home makes me happy (now).

My life is really fun and very fulfilling. There is definitely room for minor improvements, but it's all happening. My frequently bad mental health makes it easy to lose sight of the beauty in my life, but when I'm not too far into my head, I know it's there and it keeps me together. I've spent all of my life with bad mental health, but the older I get and the more I figure stuff out, the better I get. I experience a lot of pitfalls where I'm easily thrown back into depressive states and panic attacks and of course, there are always the "bad days." The "rough patch" (gotta love the use of quotes!) I've been in for the last few months really had me feeling hopeless for awhile, but everyday I receive so many reminders to stay hopeful.

The title of this zine was inspired by all of the bridges I've burned for mental health reasons. This used to be something that really bothered me, but I'm grateful for it now as I've learned to trust and appreciate my instincts and I have the best friends I could ever have.

I would really like to have more REAL conversations about mental health/illness, especially if you live in Portland, so please get in touch:

Jenny Bruso

[REDACTED]
U.S.A.

I prefer letters as opposed to e-mail, but if e-mail is how you roll: [REDACTED]

My main zine is called, Not Sorry. It is my personal collection of writing on identity, body image, love and life in general as a fat, queer woman in Portland, Oregon. I have 4 issues available: #1/#2 (compilation), #3, #4 & #5. Not Sorry #5 was released in June 2007, so it's a good place to start. If you live in the U.S., Canada or Mexico, please send \$2 to the address above. For everywhere else, please send \$3.50 in cash or money order. U.S. dollars only. Thanks!

I also run a distro cleverly called, Not Sorry Distro, which features zines and crafts dealing with issues of looksism and body image. This includes, but is not limited to sizism, eating disorders, external body issues & politics and fat-positivity.

All of these things can be seen & bought online at
<http://www.otsorry.org>

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Hi, I'm Jenny Bruso! I'm a 25-year-old, grrrl-identified, Unicorn Femme, thrashed Peggy Bundy wannabe, FAT, eternal optimist, activist because I have no other choice, LOVER, fighter, crafter, aspiring homebody, zinester and shit-starting bitch who means business. I want to say that I'm not as serious as I sound, but I kind of am. Let's have a riot grrrl dance party!

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